

IN THE CLAIMS:

Please CANCEL claims 22, 27-43, 67 and 68 without prejudice to or disclaimer of the recited subject matter.

Please AMEND claims 23, 26, 58-60, 64-66, 69 and 72, as presented in the substitute specification. Please note that all claims currently pending in this application are reproduced in the substitute specification for the Examiner's convenience.

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WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

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1. (Previously Amended) An exposure apparatus to be used with an excimer laser as a light source, said apparatus comprising:

an optical system disposed along a path of excimer laser light;

a chamber for accommodating said optical system therein and having an inside space being able to be replaced by a predetermined gas;

a gas circulation mechanism having a gas circulation path for connecting a gas discharging port for discharging a gas from said chamber and a gas supplying port for supplying a gas into said chamber; and

switching means for selectively using plural purifiers disposed in the gas circulation path.

2. (Original) An apparatus according to Claim 1, wherein said purifiers are disposed in parallel to each other in a portion of the gas circulation path.

3. (Previously Amended) An apparatus according to Claim 1, further comprising a switching valve for selectively flowing the gas to one of upstream and downstream of said purifiers, and for selectively flowing the gas to any one of said purifiers.

4. (Original) An apparatus according to Claim 3, wherein said valve is operable to shut the gas flow to at least one purifier.

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5. (Previously Amended) An apparatus according to Claim 4, wherein said valve is operable to shut the gas flow to a purifier, which (i) is to be replaced by another or (ii) needs maintenance.

6. (Original) An apparatus according to Claim 3, wherein said valve is operable in response to a signal from a control system.

7. (Original) An apparatus according to Claim 1, further comprising a gas supply source for supplying a gas to said purifier, and a gas discharging mechanism for discharging gas from said purifier.

8. (Original) An apparatus according to Claim 7, wherein, on the basis of said switching means, a gas from said gas supply source is supplied to said purifier to which no gas is supplied from said chamber, and wherein, on the basis of said gas discharging mechanism, the gas is discharged from said purifier.

9. (Original) An apparatus according to Claim 7, further comprising a second valve for opening and closing a flowpassage between said gas supply source and said purifier.

10. (Original) An apparatus according to Claim 7, wherein said gas supply source supplies an inactive gas to said purifier.

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11. (Original) An apparatus according to Claim 10, wherein the inactive gas is one of helium and nitrogen.

12. (Previously Amended) An apparatus according to Claim 7, wherein the supply of gas from said gas supply source is performed after (i) replacement of said purifier or (ii) maintenance of said purifier.

13. (Original) An apparatus according to Claim 7, wherein introduction of a gas of said chamber to said purifier is initiated in accordance with one of a gas flowing time of said gas supply source and an output of a gas detector.

14. (Previously Amended) An exposure apparatus to be used with an excimer laser as a light source, said apparatus comprising:

an optical system disposed along a path of excimer laser light;

a chamber for accommodating said optical system therein and having an inside space being able to be replaced by a predetermined gas;

a gas circulation mechanism having a gas discharging port for discharging a gas from said chamber and a gas supply port for supplying a gas into said chamber;

switching means for selectively using plural purifiers disposed in a portion of a gas circulation path; and

a bypass way for circulating the gas inside said chamber, without passing through said purifier.

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15. (Original) An apparatus according to Claim 14, further comprising a third valve for changing flowpassages to said bypass way and said purifier.

16. (Original) An apparatus according to Claim 14, wherein said bypass way is used at least when said apparatus is started.

17. (Original) An apparatus according to Claim 1, wherein the gas from said purifier is supplied to a supply port while being temperature controlled.

18. (Original) An apparatus according to Claim 1, wherein said purifier has a function for removing oxygen.

19. (Previously Amended) An apparatus according to Claim 1, wherein said purifier has a function for removing ozone.

20. (Original) An apparatus according to Claim 1, wherein said purifier has a chemical filter.

21. (Original) An apparatus according to Claim 20, wherein said chemical filter is effective to remove an organic gas.

22. (Cancelled)

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23. (Currently Amended) An exposure apparatus to be used with an excimer laser as a light source, said apparatus comprising:

first and second chambers for maintaining a predetermined gas ambience at a path of excimer laser light, wherein said first chamber has an optical integrator and said second chamber is adapted to enclose a masking blade for defining an illumination range on a reticle; and

an optical member for spatially separating said first and second chambers from each other, and being transmissive to the excimer laser light,

wherein said optical member contains a fluorine compound glass.

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24. (Previously Amended) An exposure apparatus to be used with an excimer laser as a light source, said apparatus comprising:

first and second chambers for maintaining a predetermined gas ambience at a path of excimer laser light, wherein said first chamber has an optical integrator;

an optical member for spatially separating said first and second chambers from each other, and being transmissive to the excimer laser light, wherein said optical member contains a fluorine compound glass; and

a half mirror disposed between said optical integrator and said fluorine compound glass, wherein light reflected by said half mirror is detected to determine the light quantity.

25. (Previously Cancelled)

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~~26~~. (Currently Amended) An apparatus to be used with an excimer laser as a light source, said apparatus comprising:

first and second chambers for maintaining a predetermined gas ambience at a path of excimer laser light, wherein said second chamber is adapted to enclose a masking blade for defining an illumination range on a reticle; and

an optical member for spatially separating said first and second chambers from each other, and being transmissive to the excimer laser light,

wherein said optical member contains a fluorine compound glass, wherein the fluorine compound glass uses one of CaF_2 , MgF_2 , SrF_2 and fluorine doped quartz.

[27-43. (Cancelled)

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~~44~~. (Previously Amended) An exposure apparatus comprising:
an optical system, having a plurality of optical elements, including a reflection member for deflecting an optical axis of said optical system, and a plurality of refraction members; and

gas supplying means for supplying a gas to a space separated by the plurality of optical elements, wherein, in a space separated by two refraction members of said plurality of refraction members and containing said reflection member, a line connecting a vent hole for supplying a gas to the space and a vent hole for discharging the gas from the space intersects an optical axis of said optical system, as viewed from a direction orthogonal to the optical axes of said two refraction members.

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~~45~~. (Previously Amended) An apparatus according to Claim ²⁵~~44~~, wherein the line intersects the optical axis of said optical system twice, as viewed from a direction orthogonal to the optical axes of said two refraction members.

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~~46~~. (Previously Amended) An apparatus according to Claim ²⁵~~44~~, wherein the gas is an inactive gas.

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~~47~~. (Original) An apparatus according to Claim ²⁵~~44~~, wherein the inactive gas is one of nitrogen gas and helium gas.

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~~48~~. (Original) An apparatus according to Claim ²⁵~~44~~, wherein the light source emits light of a wavelength in a vacuum ultraviolet region.

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~~49~~. (Previously Amended) An apparatus according to Claim ²⁵~~44~~, wherein the light source comprises one of an F₂ laser and an Ar₂ laser.

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~~50~~. (Original) An apparatus according to Claim ²⁵~~44~~, wherein said optical system is at least one of an illumination optical system and a projection optical system.

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~~51~~. (Previously Amended) An apparatus according to Claim ²⁵~~44~~, wherein said optical system includes one of a catadioptric system and a catoptric system.

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~~52.~~ (Previously Amended) A device manufacturing method, comprising the steps of:

providing an exposure apparatus as recited in Claim 1;
applying a photosensitive material to a wafer;
exposing the wafer by use of the exposure apparatus; and
developing the exposed wafer.

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~~53.~~ (Previously Amended) A semiconductor manufacturing factory, comprising:

a production machine group including an exposure apparatus as recited in
Claim 1;
a local area network for connecting the production machine group; and
a gateway for enabling access from the local area network to an external
network outside said factory,
wherein information related to at least one production machine in said
production machine group is data communicated.

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~~54.~~ (Previously Amended) A maintenance method for an exposure apparatus as
recited in Claim 1 and being placed in a semiconductor manufacturing factory, said method
comprising the steps of:

preparing a maintenance database connected to an outside network of the
factory, wherein the database can be prepared by a user or a vendor of the exposure apparatus;
admitting access to the maintenance database through the outside network,
from the factory; and

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transmitting maintenance information stored in the maintenance database to the factory through the outside network.

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55. (Previously Added) A device manufacturing method, comprising the steps of:
providing an exposure apparatus as recited in Claim ¹⁴/~~14~~;
applying a photosensitive material to a wafer;
exposing the wafer by use of the exposure apparatus; and
developing the exposed wafer.

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56. (Previously Added) A semiconductor manufacturing factory, comprising:
a production machine group including an exposure apparatus as recited in Claim 14;
a local area network for connecting the production machine group; and
a gateway for enabling access from the local area network to an external network outside said factory,
wherein information related to at least one production machine in said production machine group is data communicated.

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57. (Previously Added) A maintenance method for an exposure apparatus as recited in Claim 14 and being placed in a semiconductor manufacturing factory, said method comprising the steps of:

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preparing a maintenance database connected to an outside network of the factory, wherein the database can be prepared by a user or a vendor of the exposure apparatus; admitting access to the maintenance database through the outside network, from the factory; and transmitting maintenance information stored in the maintenance database to the factory through the outside network.

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58. (Currently Amended) A device manufacturing method, comprising the steps of:

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providing an exposure apparatus as recited in Claim 23;
applying a photosensitive material to a wafer;
exposing the wafer by use of the exposure apparatus; and
developing the exposed wafer.

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59. (Currently Amended) A semiconductor manufacturing factory, comprising:

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Claim 23;
a production machine group including an exposure apparatus as recited in

a local area network for connecting the production machine group; and
a gateway for enabling access from the local area network to an external network outside said factory,

wherein information related to at least one production machine in said production machine group is data communicated.

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~~60.~~ (Currently Amended) A maintenance method for an exposure apparatus as recited in Claim ²²~~23~~ and being placed in a semiconductor manufacturing factory, said method comprising the steps of:

preparing a maintenance database connected to an outside network of the factory, wherein the database can be prepared by a user or a vendor of the exposure apparatus;

admitting access to the maintenance database through the outside network, from the factory; and

transmitting maintenance information stored in the maintenance database to the factory through the outside network.

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~~61.~~ (Previously Added) A device manufacturing method, comprising the steps of:

providing an exposure apparatus as recited in Claim ²³~~24~~;

applying a photosensitive material to a wafer;

exposing the wafer by use of the exposure apparatus; and

developing the exposed wafer.

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~~62.~~ (Previously Added) A semiconductor manufacturing factory, comprising:

a production machine group including an exposure apparatus as recited in

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Claim ~~24~~;

a local area network for connecting the production machine group; and

a gateway for enabling access from the local area network to an external network outside said factory,

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wherein information related to at least one production machine in said production machine group is data communicated.

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63. (Previously Added) A maintenance method for an exposure apparatus as recited in Claim ²³~~24~~ and being placed in a semiconductor manufacturing factory, said method comprising the steps of:

preparing a maintenance database connected to an outside network of the factory, wherein the database can be prepared by a user or a vendor of the exposure apparatus;

admitting access to the maintenance database through the outside network, from the factory; and

transmitting maintenance information stored in the maintenance database to the factory through the outside network.

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64. (Currently Amended) A device manufacturing method, comprising the steps of:

providing an exposure apparatus as recited in Claim ²⁴~~26~~;

applying a photosensitive material to a wafer;

exposing the wafer by use of the exposure apparatus; and

developing the exposed wafer.

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65. (Currently Amended) A semiconductor manufacturing factory, comprising:

a production machine group including an exposure apparatus as recited in Claim ²⁴~~26~~;

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a local area network for connecting the production machine group; and
a gateway for enabling access from the local area network to an external
network outside said factory,

wherein information related to at least one production machine in said
production machine group is data communicated.

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~~66~~. (Currently Amended) A maintenance method for an exposure apparatus to be
used with an excimer laser as a light source and being placed in a semiconductor
manufacturing factory, said apparatus comprising (i) first and second chambers for
maintaining a predetermined gas ambience at a path of excimer laser light, (ii) an optical
member for spatially separating said first and second chambers from each other, and being
transmissive to the excimer laser light, wherein said optical member contains a fluorine
compound glass, and (iii) a third chamber for enclosing at least one of said first and second
chambers, said method comprising the steps of:

preparing a maintenance database connected to an outside network of the
factory, wherein the database can be prepared by a user or a vendor of the exposure apparatus;

admitting access to the maintenance database through the outside network,
from the factory; and

transmitting maintenance information stored in the maintenance database to
the factory through the outside network.

67-68. (Cancelled)

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~~69~~. (Currently Amended) A maintenance method for an exposure apparatus to be used with an excimer laser as a light source and being placed in a semiconductor manufacturing factory, said apparatus comprising (i) first and second chambers for maintaining a predetermined gas ambience at a path of excimer laser light, and (ii) a movable member for connecting said first and second chambers with each other, to secure gas tightness and to enable absorption of relative displacement between said first and second chambers, said method comprising the steps of:

preparing a maintenance database connected to an outside network of the factory, wherein the database can be prepared by a user or a vendor of the exposure apparatus;

admitting access to the maintenance database through the outside network, from the factory; and

transmitting maintenance information stored in the maintenance database to the factory through the outside network.

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~~70~~. (Previously Added) A device manufacturing method, comprising the steps of:

providing an exposure apparatus as recited in Claim ²⁵~~44~~;

applying a photosensitive material to a wafer;

exposing the wafer by use of the exposure apparatus; and

developing the exposed wafer.

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~~41~~ (Previously Added) A semiconductor manufacturing factory, comprising:

a production machine group including an exposure apparatus as recited in

Claim ²⁵~~44~~;

a local area network for connecting the production machine group; and

a gateway for enabling access from the local area network to an external network outside said factory,

wherein information related to at least one production machine in said production machine group is data communicated.

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~~72~~ (Currently Amended) A maintenance method for an exposure apparatus being placed in a semiconductor manufacturing factory and comprising (i) an optical system, having a plurality of optical elements, including a reflection member for deflecting an optical axis of said optical system, and a plurality of refraction members, and (ii) gas supplying means for supplying a gas to a space separated by the plurality of optical elements, wherein, in a space separated by two refraction members of said plurality of refraction members and containing said reflection member, a line connecting a vent hole for supplying a gas to the space and a vent hole for discharging the gas from the space intersects an optical axis of said optical system, as viewed from a direction orthogonal to the optical axes of said two refraction members, said method comprising the steps of:

preparing a maintenance database connected to an outside network of the factory, wherein the database can be prepared by a user or a vendor of the exposure apparatus;

admitting access to the maintenance database through the outside network,
from the factory; and
transmitting maintenance information stored in the maintenance database to
the factory through the outside network.

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